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AUTHOR Levine, Louis S.
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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews several studies which analyze the intelligence, personality characteristics, and motivations of prospective and inservice teachers and compares them to persons working in other fields. It finds that the general stereotype of the teacher as being intellectually inferior to individuals in other fields is not supported by the available evidence. Rather than finding results generalizable to preservice and inservice teachers, the studies indicated that the psychological characteristics of men and women who enter and complete teacher training are quite different. Also, there are differences between elementary and secondary school teachers and between teachers and administrators with respect to personality characteristics, and there are personality differences among those who enter the various schools that provide teacher training. The prime motivations for entering teaching were found to be a desire for upward mobility and simply lack of interest in any other field. The author concludes with a statement of the need for studies correlating teacher characteristics with valid measures of teaching effectiveness. (The paper includes a 22-page bibliography.) (RT)

THE AMERICAN TEACHER: A TENTATIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION

Louis S. Levine¹

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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The American teacher and the American school have been portrayed in many different ways. Teachers have been described as saintly and as sadistic, involved and indifferent, competent and incompetent, wise and stupid, resourceful and unimaginative. They have been characterized as knowing how to teach and what to teach and as being effective on both counts. Some have said the teacher knows only how to teach but does not know his subject matter. The severest critics of teachers maintain that the teacher neither knows how to teach nor does he know the substance of his subject. The evaluation of teachers is frequently linked with the evaluation of the schools and the society as a system. Thus, the range of observations pertaining to the system in which the teacher is a functioning element is also of interest to us here. Stereotypes of the schools have ranged from the "blackboard jungle" to suburban educational sanctuaries.²

¹Associate Director for Research, Center for Research and Education in American Liberties, Teachers College, Columbia University;

Professor of Psychology, San Francisco State College (on leave)

²A summary of the conflicting views of teachers and schools is presented by M.A. Farber in the New York Times, January 28, 1968. In this summary he presents the view of Robert J. Havighurst, Visiting Professor at Fordham University, who called for a "moratorium on purely negative criticism" of the public schools. Havighurst's defense of the schools included an attack on those whom he classified as "non-responsible" authors. These individuals and their writings include:

Friedenberg, E.Z. Coming of age in America: growth and acquiescence. New York: Random House, 1965.,

Goodman, P. Compulsory mis-education and the community of scholars. New York: Vintage Books, 1964.,

Holt, J. How children fail. New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1964.,

Kozol, J. Death at an early age. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967.,

Kohl, H. 36 Children. New York: New American Library, 1967..

In any efforts to characterize American teachers and the schools, two salient points must be noted at the outset. The first point is that the wide diversity that exists among the psychological characteristics of teachers in the public schools as a partial function of their number. Presently there are over 1,250,000 elementary and secondary school teachers in the United States. The second point is that the schools are a reflection of the total society and its wishes with respect to what it wants taught, and whom it wants to teach.

The accompanying bibliography--although incomplete, and which covers the span of years from 1957 to 1967--does indicate that the intellectual, personality, and motivational characteristics of the teacher have been of considerable interest to researchers. It does not, of course, follow that knowledge is necessarily directly proportional to the researcher's enthusiasms in choosing an area of inquiry. As a careful analysis of the total literature pertaining to the intellectual, personality and motivational characteristics of teachers reveals: there are few generalizations which can be drawn from the studies which have been conducted. Before offering the several tentative generalizations which appear to follow from the data presently available, several issues which complicate the interpretation of the available data must be mentioned.

The interlocking character of social process and individual behavior is such that the specific career choices that individuals make is determined by a host of economic and social forces operative at that point in time when the career decisions are made. The opportunities that exist for creative, intelligent, talented and poor young people are different

in times of affluence, depression, war and peace. The behavior of the gatekeepers who determine admission policies at college, university, and occupational points is also a significant factor which influences the psychological and social characteristics of those who are permitted entry into given occupations and those who are closed out. The expectations and aspirations as well as the realities and perception of the realities depend not only on the life history of the individual and his transactions with the society, but also on the length of time in which his family has been within the culture and where they are relative to the mainstream of the society. The well-known phenomenon of the child of the immigrant entering teacher training as one of the fields offering excellent opportunities for upward social mobility is but a reflection of this latter point. Teacher-training institutions which twenty years ago catered to exclusively or predominantly Caucasian populations, offering the rationale that their Negro graduates found difficulty in being placed, now vie with one another for increasing the percentage of Negro students in their schools.

Individual studies relating to teacher characteristics require interpretation within the temporal and social context, and in terms of how the social processes are manifest within the given geographic region and in the specific academic institution. In most of the studies undertaken that pertain to the characteristics of teacher trainees or teachers, there has been minimal attention given to effective descriptions of the individuals, their backgrounds, the institutional character of the training institutions or the

schools in which they teach, or to the general play of the social forces relevant to career choices. Further, the effort to compare fragmented research studies is made difficult by the diversity in method, populations, procedures, measurement, techniques, and absence of relevant social and psychological data. For example; in many of the available studies the typical research approach is to compare a group of students who may be enrolled in teacher training to a "comparable" group of students in another major. Personality differences have been frequently reported through the utilization of noting the statistically significant scale scores on personality inventories such as the Edwards Personal Preference Test, The California Personality Inventory or the Minnesota Multiphasic Inventory. When the question is whether such groups differ in interests, the Strong or the Kuder test results may be analyzed, and a determination of differences between group means calculated. When this format is employed it is quite possible to attain statistically significant differences between groups on specific variables yet to have vast overlap between the characteristics of teachers and members of other professions with respect to personality and interest variables. The fact that statistical significance is often a partial function of the number of cases utilized in the study means that relatively small differences in mean scores between groups may occur when the sample is large. This further means that for all practical purposes the likelihood of given individuals possessing the group characteristics may be exceedingly small, and for the on-the-line administrator, personnel officer, or college instructor such findings may have little

practical utility.

With these qualifications in mind, the findings relative to the intellectual, personality, and motivational factors can be summarized in the several generalizations that follow.

The Intellectual Capability of Teacher Trainees and Teachers

The general stereotype of the teacher trainee as being intellectually inferior to individuals who select majors other than education is not clearly supported by the available evidence. For example, in a study conducted in a municipal college in New York City during the late 1950's, over four thousand liberal arts and teacher-education oriented students were compared. Though slightly higher scores on the college entrance examinations were obtained for the intended liberal arts majors of both sexes, the differences were not statistically significant.³

Different colleges, universities, and teacher-training institutions vary with respect to the year of entry at which students interested in pursuing a teaching profession begin their academic and practical training. For example, at San Francisco State College--one of the largest teacher-training institutions in California--students traditionally begin their teacher-training programs during either the first or second year of their upper division work. In a study of all students who entered teacher training during the Spring Semester of 1957 and who were compared to the national

³Mitzel, H. E. and Dubnick, L. Relative scholastic ability of prospective teachers. Journal of Teacher Education, March, 1961, 12:78-80. The same authors published a rather complete review of data obtained from the nationwide Selective Service screening in 1950 to 1952 from which they were able to compare the norms of teachers college students with those from liberal arts schools in terms of their scholastic aptitude and test results. The authors found a high degree of variation and concluded that the charge of inferior academic ability of teachers who entered teacher training during this period was unsubstantiated.

norms on the ACT, no consequential differences were found in either verbal, quantitative, or total scores for men, nor verbal scores for the women. A small group difference was noted in the quantitative abilities of women education students.⁴

The issue of entering teacher training is different from the issues of whether the individual completes teacher training or whether he enters and remains in the field of teaching as a professional career. In one of the most comprehensive studies undertaken, the careers of individuals who had taken a common battery of aptitude tests in the Air Force in 1943 were followed for a period of more than a decade it was found that of the individuals who had been classroom teachers and college teachers those who had demonstrated higher abilities in 1943 on tests of reading comprehension, arithmetic reasoning, and mathematics were more likely to have left the field of teaching.⁵

In view of the fact that intellectual ability, no matter how measured, contributes only approximately one-fourth of the variance to any measure of attainment--academic, or otherwise, the definitive issues relating to the psychological characteristics of teachers would appear to be their personality and motivation.

The Personality of The Teacher

Because the teacher is a central factor in creating the conditions conducive to classroom learning, the assumption is made too readily that the one single set of characteristics descriptive of the personality of

⁴Levine, L.S. Students entering and completing teacher training A Monograph. San Francisco State College, 1960.

Thorndike, R. L. & Hagen, E. Men teachers and ex-teachers: some attitudes and traits. Teachers College Record, January, 1961, 62: 302-316.

the good teacher will carry over to all teachers at all levels. The findings do not support this contention. First, the psychological characteristics of men and women who enter and complete teacher training are quite different. Also, there are differences between elementary and secondary school teachers and between teachers and administrators with respect to personality characteristics, and there are personality differences among those who enter the various schools that provide teacher training.

The need to specify the context in which the teacher is functioning is demonstrated in the findings of a study in which personality data were obtained from practicing teachers in the Chicago area, teacher trainees at a mid-west state university, a southern Negro college, and a private urban teachers college. The authors of this study put forth three hypotheses, all of which were corroborated. These hypotheses were:

1) Trainees who choose to enter a multi-purpose institution will demonstrate personality patterns that are responsive to the press of the institution rather than to the press of the profession. Conversely, teacher trainees who enter a teachers college will display personality patterns which resemble those of the practicing professionals. 2) Teaching experience tends to erase the particular need structures that were responsive to the press of the training institution and produces a pattern that corresponds to teaching groups regardless of their academic background. This pattern, the authors suggest, is characterized by being highly deferential, placing a premium on order and endurance and of low heterosexuality (as judged in terms of prevalent interest patterns), and of high

dominance and the need to perform. 3) For a given school, the more nearly the teachers approximate the typical teacher-personality pattern the less likely they are to feel satisfied, effective, and confident in the ability of their administrative officials, and the more likely the administration is to regard them as effective.⁶

Findings of the study indicated above are of particular interest because they point out that personality characteristics of individuals who choose to enter certain colleges differ, and that the college itself may have a differential effect on the personality characteristics of the student. Thus, the problem of specifying psychological characteristics of personality of teachers independent of the context either in which they are studying or working is somewhat hazardous. Yet, the counter expectation would seem to follow (also on the basis of the Guber study) that time in the profession itself seems to erase the influences of earlier experience and the nature of the academic institution. And to an extent this is true --keeping in mind the qualifications previously noted, the teachers who demonstrate differential responses to their administrators and to parents are apt to be judged favorably by them. Efficiency and physical endurance undoubtedly are required in dealing with large numbers of students over six or so consecutive hours of the day and usually with little opportunity for the usual aesthetic or physical amenities as Friedenberg has noted.⁷ The finding that teachers, in general, score low on the measures of heterosexuality must be very clearly understood as a comment on teacher interest, rather than on their actual sexuality. A man who is interested in literature, painting,

⁶Guba, E. G., et al. Occupational choice and the teaching career. Educational Research Bulletin, January, 1959, 38:1-12.

⁷Friedenberg, 1965.

people and music will tend to receive a low heterosexual score. These scores are really matters of interest and taste rather than of sexuality.

Another theme that runs through a number of studies is the tendency, particularly of the male teacher, toward an authoritarian and rigid personality. In the standardization population of the California Personality Inventory, it was found that next to military officers, teachers, as a group, were the least flexible of all of the occupations represented in the test standardization population. The study conducted at San Francisco State in the late 1950's that pertained to individuals who entered the teacher training program, found that there was statistically significant differences between individuals entering teacher training and the normative population for the California Personality Inventory. The male teacher trainees were more aggressive, persuasive, verbally fluent, outgoing, enthusiastic, spontaneous, competitive, energetic and self-centered than the population of all college men. Also, they were more inclined to be dogmatic, undercontrolled, impulsive, opinionated, rebellious, undependable, assertive and more concerned with self-gain than the total population of all college males. The men entering teacher training were also noted as more appreciative, patient, helpful, and gentle than the general population of all college men.⁸

In the same study, the women teacher trainees at point of entry into their professional teacher programs, when compared to all college women, were inclined to be more self-confident, self-assured, more verbally fluent,

⁸Levine, 1960.

cooperative, helpful and dilligent. But they were also more conventional and less resourceful; more restricted in their general outlook and range of interest, and more in need of supervision and direction. In this specific study, when the men and women entering teacher training were compared, the men were scored as more impulsive, aggressive, assertive, and egocentric than the women; also less mature, responsible, and self-controlled. This comparison is of special significance. The tendency to fill administrative openings in public schools with men, and that they are preferred over women as administrators by other administrators and by boards of education does not appear to operate in the best interest of the schools or the needs of the children. The inequity to women of considerable competence and talent in this situation is, of course, discriminatory in practice, and is a subject that goes beyond the scope of this present paper.

Teaching and Motivation

The point has been made earlier that the motives which influence specific individuals to seek entry and to remain in teacher training and in the teaching profession vary with the social and economic conditions prevelant during specific periods of time. The study conducted at the University of Montana during the 1964-1965 term is considered representative of the studies during this period that utilize data based upon student questionnaires and student interviews.⁹ In this study, the 226 univervity students who had selected teaching as a career indicated that

⁹Hood, C.E. Why 226 university students selected teaching as a career, Clearing House, December, 1965, 40: 228-31.

they believed teachers perform a valuable service to society and that teaching affords them the opportunity to work with young people. This statement of interest by teacher trainees in working with young people holds up through time and has been reported in various studies over the last 30 years. The consistency of this response, and the fact that it is part of a role or social expectation, leads one to question its significance since in several studies in which individuals have attributed their interest in teaching to their desire to work with young children they had relatively minimal exposure to young children. However, returning to the statements made by the University of Montana students in the 1964-1965 period, they also noted that the teaching profession affords a springboard or avenue of entry into other fields. The impression of the present writer is that in many instances the decision to enter teaching is arrived at by default rather than by design. Confronted with the necessity of making a specific occupational choice, the student about to enter college or the student in college who is faced with deciding on his major is influenced by the availability of opportunity and by the number of alternatives that the career choice affords. Thus, business education may be selected as a major by an individual who is not totally certain whether he actually wants a business career or is uncertain as to the specific aspect of the commercial world which appeals to him. The well-known phenomenon of the young woman who believes that elementary school training will help her in raising her own children represents the moti- vation--of many women who make the career decision to enter the profession

of teaching. Here the major interest may be to marry and raise a family, and the choice of the professional career is probably viewed as congruent with her primary aspiration.

In the Montana study cited above, the prospective teachers stated that one of the disadvantages they perceived in the career of teaching was that the personal freedom of teachers is restricted in certain communities. Further, they stated that teachers' salaries are less than those paid in many other professions requiring the same amount of training, they might have to present subject material that they were unqualified to teach, and that the expected work load would be excessive.

The unfavorable views which teacher trainees hold toward teaching conditions are not unrealistic as the available literature indicates. In a summary of the relevant research on this issue, the following factors were consistently stated by individuals who had taught for a year and left the teaching profession: Income was inadequate; teaching loads were excessive; teachers were assigned duties that ranged far beyond the classroom or teaching activities; supervisory assistance was inadequate or not available; and the assignments given to first-year teachers were felt by them to be inappropriate.

In addition to the five explanations above, the list of frequently cited reasons for leaving the teaching profession included inadequate preparation, inadequate facilities, and a lack of opportunity to develop new ideas. Some of the teacher drop-outs complained of routine clerical duties and poor faculty relationships as their major reasons for leaving the field of teaching.¹⁰

¹⁰Nelson, R.H. and Thompson, M.L. Why teachers quit: Factors influencing teachers to leave their classroom after the first year. Clearing House, April, 1963, 3: 46-7-72.

The perceptions of students entering teacher training, particularly the disadvantages about which they are concerned and the reasons offered by first-year teachers who drop out of the teaching profession, are congruent with the results of a study reported in 1963 which covered a time span of thirty-three years. Of those who responded, 14% had left public-school employment. These teachers and administrators stated that their major reasons for leaving were inadequate salaries, that they experienced a lack of satisfaction in the teaching profession, and that they felt the respect and status which they deserved within their communities was not forthcoming.¹¹

Again it must be noted that the above characterizations of teachers can only be accepted tentatively because of the finding that in most of the studies there is an almost complete overlap of the intellectual, personality, and motivational attributes between the teacher groups and other occupations.

It is this writer's opinion that current teacher-training populations may have a higher incidence of youthful activists and idealists than was the case even five years ago. These impressions have been reported to the writer from several schools and could be due to the larger number of youthful militants in all school programs than some years ago. There is also the possibility that increased numbers of dedicated youth want to contribute to creating a better world and are deliberately entering teaching in order to work within the urban ghetto with the so-called disadvantaged. Another

¹¹Willey, R.L. A behind the scenes look at some former teachers, School and community, April, 1963, 49: 15 - 40 - 41

question that this writer has not been able to substantiate empirically, is whether there is now a higher incidence of black students in teacher-training programs than was the case a decade ago. The assumption that this is so seems defenseable on several counts. One is the desire of many institutions--teacher training and otherwise--to enlist and in fact to compete for Negroes. Whether the recruitment efforts will substantially increase the number of Negro students in teacher-training programs is, of course, conjectural at this point. At San Francisco State College, for example, where the number of individuals who are enrolled in teacher training constitute approximately 34% of the total enrollment of the institution, the total Negro student population is just slightly above 4%. There is no evidence to indicate that a higher incidence of this relatively small percentage of Negro students in the school enter the field of teacher training as compared to any other major. A year ago the University of California at Berkeley, with some 27,000 enrolled students, had a Negro student population of less than 1%. Since then, though special efforts have been made to increase the undergraduate enrollment, the ultimate outcome of these efforts, as far as persons entering the teaching field, is as yet uncertain.

Pursuing a speculative theme, here, we can anticipate that a number of changes may be occurring in the types of individuals who will seek admission to teacher-training programs and who will persist in teaching careers. We note, of course, that as yet in this paper we have not discussed the issue of the intellectual, personality, and motivational characteristics that are correlated with the various measures of teaching effectiveness. The difficulty of identifying a clear-cut criterion of teacher effectiveness is well

known, as is the fact that such determinations when made by administrators, colleagues, and students will often vary markedly. In general, the studies which have utilized various techniques to identify good teachers follows the results obtained by Ryans.¹² He generalized that the good teacher shows superior intellectual ability, and above average adaptation to his own school experience. According to Ryans, a good teacher is relatively well adjusted emotionally, demonstrates favorable attitudes toward his pupils, and enjoys contact with them. He is generous in his appraisal of the behavior and motives of other persons, and has a higher than average rate of participation in social and community activities. The good teacher is apt to have a higher order of interest in reading, music, and painting than teachers who are judged less effective, and he shows strong social-service interests.

In one sense, the statement describing the good teacher could equally well describe the "good person" in a democratic society. The issue is whether the qualities that presently characterize individuals who enter and remain in teaching, or even those which characterize the "good" teacher, are necessarily those which should be employed in the selection of teachers, or be viewed by those in charge of their training as appropriate to the future teaching situation. Consider, for example, the pressures toward school decentralization in the major urban centers. If schools are decentralized, then the competencies involved in working much more closely with parents--particularly parents of children from minority groups--will require greater

¹²Ryans, D.G. Profile of the good teacher. School and Society. November, 1960, 88:424.

emphasis. It is a commonplace observation that some individuals who are excellent at working with young children are not particularly comfortable in their inter-personal relationships with adults. To the extent this is so (if it is) what types of in-service and pre-service training can be brought to bear to extend the range of teacher competencies? This problem represents a compelling challenge to those concerned with teacher training. The extent to which all teachers--those in suburbia as well as those in the inner cities--will have to become more knowledgeable and more informed about the history and contribution the Negro American has made to this society. The basic elements of prejudice, whether they arise from neurosis or from ignorance, are issues that the total society will not be able to avoid in the years of racial crisis ahead. Whether the educational enterprise will be able to contribute to breaking the equation that difference equals danger, of course, constitutes one of the major questions of our time. Its answer will depend, in part, on the degree to which the teachers of the future will be able to act appropriately and be able to face difference without fear.¹³

The transition of the teacher's role from that of primary informational source to that of the counselor, in the best sense of the term, which will accompany the technology and curriculum modifications that lie ahead, will require marked changes in the teacher's ability to deal with students as individuals; the special competencies required of adults who contribute to the full development of young people will have to be given more attention in pre

¹³Levine, L.S. Imposed social position: Assessment and curriculum implications. The Bulletin, NASSP, 1966, 50: 44-59.

and in-service teacher training.

Those presently concerned with teacher training undoubtedly see the full range of the human characteristics mentioned above reflected in the persons who arrive at their classrooms. Undoubtedly, most college professors place a high value on facilitating the learning of their particular subject matter. Unfortunately, we don't know, for example, whether the subject matter that is presented in most college programs is in fact relevant to the development of children or young people; nor do we know whether or not the acquisition of knowledge, as such, in any way contributes to the classroom behavior of the teacher. Yet, we do know that to the typical college professor, his is the important course. The curriculum "imperative" is automatically evoked when new courses or programs are proposed to faculty committees. The descriptions of the status quo courses presented eloquently by their defenders would cause the students who have taken these same courses to wonder with amazement how the unusual merit of these classes had managed to evade them.

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Until adequate longitudinal studies of teachers are available, the problem of adequately characterizing the teacher, his classroom, his school, and the community; the implications of such findings, for society in general and teacher training specifically, can only be approached most tentatively.

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